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The Weimar Republic and the War of Memory

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HIST 4300: Junior Seminar

Dr. Hochman

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This paper is about the havoc World War I unleashed on Germany and its impact on the Weimar Republic. While the war dismantled Imperial Germany, a second war soon began to brew within the newly-formed republic. This war over the memory of the Great War was a key player in Weimar's destruction, and was rooted in differing interpretations of the war's meaning, which existed as soon as the declarations of August 1914. The first of such narratives was the "Spirit of 1914," an exuberant celebration of the war's conception that took hold of Germans and drove them and their celebrations into the streets. Roger Chickering, Professor of History in the Center for German and European Studies at Georgetown University, argues that this "rhapsody on national unity offered no realistic formula for solving the problems that beset Germany in 1914 [and] was bound instead to raise expectations that the pressures of industrial warfare were calculated to frustrate."¹ As colossal losses and the realization that this war would not be quickly fought and won beset Germans, many realized that the optimistic promises the "Spirit of 1914" offered would come to naught. The almost immediate frustration of the "Spirit of 1914" was a dark foreshadowing of the effects of the Great War.

In this instance, we see a microcosm of the entire German war experience. Unrealistic expectations of the First World War were quickly thwarted and, in consequence, the disillusionment about the war that abounded was shoved into the hands of the Weimar Republic by Imperial Germany, which ceded its power at the war's close.² The responsibility to create a collective memory about the lost war to give meaning to the millions of soldiers' deaths and huge sacrifices on the part of the German population was laid at Weimar's feet, and the impossibility of achieving such a feat subsequently ensured that overly optimistic and unrealistic

¹ Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 17.

² Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, translated by Richard Deveson, New York: Hill and Wang, 1989, 26.

expectations of Weimar in post-war Germany would be frustrated, just as the “Spirit of 1914” had been.

While the legacy of World War I consumed national debate in all countries that it marred, its memory was more manageable in the victorious Allied countries, where colossal losses were, in a sense, justified by victory. Its legacy in Weimar Germany, however, was heavily contested. For Weimar, the war produced seemingly insurmountable obstacles such as “the war guilt clause” of the Treaty of Versailles, a new republic that rose from the ashes of Imperial Germany, and the difficulty of confronting the unprecedented loss of life in the face of Germany’s defeat. Ultimately, such obstacles bred a dangerous debate, as they destabilized the political system. Imperial Germany’s defeat in a war it had vowed to win produced a bitterness and shame that, combined with the shock of the revolution and birth of the republic, ultimately divided society on the war’s meaning. This divisiveness created a politically fragmented Germany. The Weimar Republic’s lack of a collective memory of the first total war became the center of the political debate on the republic’s viability and Germany’s future. It engendered conflicting narratives about the war’s meaning that were adopted by all sides of the political spectrum, and used to support or dismantle the republic. The conservative and extremist right’s conception of the Great War’s memory presented a conception of the war’s loss that claimed Jews, communists, socialists, women, and the supporters of the republic “stabbed the German army in the back” and betrayed the monarchy through revolution. This interpretation relied upon a scapegoating of anyone who supposedly threatened the desired return to an older, conservative order. This narrative was explicitly used to attack leftist beliefs and support for the republic’s progressive political changes, such as the abolishment of the monarchy, women’s suffrage, and workers’ rights. I will argue that Weimar’s inability to promote any consensus on the war’s meaning in

the face of opposition from the conservative and extremist right weakened the republic significantly and made it most vulnerable to destruction. Weimar's lack of a national memory was, essentially, the lack of any powerful rejection of rightist beliefs and myths about the Great War, and with no strong opposition to this narrative, it became a more accepted and appealing version of the war story. The war debate, however, was not solely limited to the political realm, and it was potently wielded in the arenas of literature and art to heighten political conflict and ensure that the war's memory seeped into every aspect of society.

Historians Detlev Peukert³ and Eric D. Weitz⁴ have identified the extreme right as one of the greatest threats to the Weimar Republic, and historians Peter Fritzsche⁵, Jerry Palmer⁶, and Benjamin Ziemann⁷ all assess how the memory of the Great War fragmented post-war Germany. Recent exploration of Weimar's history has been pursued in an effort to both acknowledge Weimar's association with the development of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, and more largely refute this association as the sole reason to study Weimar. As Detlev Peukert stated, "Weimar is more than a beginning and an end. The fourteen years of its existence constitute an era in its own right."⁸ In *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, Peukert introduces a study of Weimar that challenges the previous domination of the Sonderweg theory, which claimed that Germany was on a fixed special path to Nazism and destruction. Peukert's work argues that the development of Nazism was not guaranteed, and Weimar's failure was due to a crisis of modernization that presented a host of contradictions and complications

³ Detlev J.K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, Translated by Richard Deveson, New York: Hill and Wang, 1989

⁴ Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.

⁵ Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.

⁶ Jerry Palmer, *Memories from the Frontline: Memoirs and Meaning of The Great War from Britain, France and Germany*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

⁷ Benjamin Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations: Republican War Veterans and Weimar Political Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

⁸ Ibid, xii.

that destabilized the republic and made it vulnerable to the rise of a dangerous fascism.⁹ Peukert paved the way for extensive research that recognized Weimar as its own prominent period rather than a mere precursor to Nazism.

Eric D. Weitz, professor of History at City College and the Graduate Center at City University of New York refutes Peukert's analysis of Weimar and instead asserts that Weimar's fall was not accredited to the perils of modernity, but that it was "pushed over the precipice by a combination of the established Right, hostile to the republic from its very founding, and the newer extreme Right."¹⁰ Weitz acknowledges the costly implications of human action in Weimar's downfall and eloquently explains how a democratic republic can be dismantled from within, by those who "espouse the language of democracy and use the liberties afforded to them by democratic institutions to undermine the substance of democracy."¹¹

Peukert and Weitz's broad histories of Weimar provide invaluable information about Weimar's formation and trajectory towards destruction. Additionally, the works of historians who look more closely into the realm of memory within Weimar and its relation to the First World War are integral to my argument. In *Germans into Nazis*, Peter Fritzsche, professor of History at University of Illinois, explores how and why the Nazi Party came to power in Weimar Germany and eventually destroyed the republic. His book revolves around four monumental periods, July 1914, November 1918, January 1933, and May 1933, and examines them in chronological order to determine how Germany's social and political changes coincided with the Nazi Party's climactic rise to power.¹² Fritzsche's argument departs from the traditional observation that Germany's defeat in 1918 was the catalyst of Nazism. He argues instead that

⁹ Peukert, xiii-xiv.

¹⁰ Weitz, 5.

¹¹ Ibid, 408.

¹² Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.

1914 is the true point of departure for Nazism because the “Spirit of 1914” anticipated the Nazi deviation from an established political tradition to promote a popular ethnic nationalism and simultaneously address social reforms that Germans craved when faced with the instability of the Weimar republic.¹³ Fritzsche eloquently argues that the outbreak of the First World War and the national mood that accompanied it laid the foundation for the formation and success of National Socialism.

Jerry Palmer’s *Memories from the Frontline* offers a detailed analysis of how and why divergent understandings and representations of the war and its purpose abounded in the post-war societies of Great Britain, France, and Germany.¹⁴ Palmer focuses on literary works and memoirs to explore how their writers “made sense of their experiences through narrative, and what sense their contemporaries made of these texts.”¹⁵ Palmer argues that Germany faced a unique challenge in its public and private attempts to remember the war, because of its inability to establish an agreed upon national commemoration for its soldiers in the face of defeat, contentions about the 1918 surrender, and the republic’s birth.¹⁶ Palmer’s work explains how the contestations Germany faced were apparent in the memoirs and literary works of Weimar’s contemporaries, and emphasizes how the literary realm became another battleground for political domination.

Like Weitz and Peukert, Benjamin Ziemann refutes the notion of the *Sonderweg* in *Contested Commemorations: Republican War Veterans and Weimar Political Culture*. He goes one step further though, and argues that despite general opinion, republican war veterans were

¹³ Ibid, 7-9.

¹⁴ Jerry Palmer, *Memories from the Frontline: Memoirs and Meaning of The Great War from Britain, France and Germany*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 5.

¹⁵ Palmer, 13.

¹⁶ Palmer, 203-204.

significant players in Weimar's debate about the memory of the First World War and provided extensive support for the republic.¹⁷ Ziemann's work acknowledges the failure of groups such as the Reichsbund and Reichsbanner to successfully combat the Right's narrative that allowed it to destroy the republic, but proves that despite this failure, members of such groups "were at the forefront of attempts to develop a pro-republican language of war remembrance, and to elaborate an appropriate set of commemorative symbols and rituals in the public sphere."¹⁸ *Contested Commemorations* proves that republican supporters did exist and did fight against conservative and extreme right conceptions of Weimar's legitimacy and viability.

My argument is unique because it will integrate these assessments to identify conflict over the war's memory as the main reason for Weimar's vulnerability to the right and further the discussion surrounding Weimar's destruction. My exploration of the war memory's influence on Weimar's viability is also a continuation of the one made by Richard Bessel, Professor Emeritus of Twentieth Century History at the University of York and a specialist in the social and political history of modern Germany. In *Germany after the First World War*, Bessel asserts that the social, economic, and political issues of the Weimar Republic stemmed from the "Spirit of 1914," the First World War and its aftermath, as well as other weakened economic social structures. The consequence of such challenges was that Weimar was never capable of transitioning to peacetime, and instead remained a post-war society.¹⁹ My argument differs from the aforementioned scholars because I conclude that Weimar's debate over the memory of World War I was the republic's tipping point. The dis-unified debate over memory weakened the republic and its supporters, was used by the conservative and extreme right to destroy the

¹⁷ Benjamin Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations: Republican War Veterans and Weimar Political Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 278-279.

¹⁸ Ziemann, 3.

¹⁹ Richard Bessel, *Germany after the First World War*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, 283-284.

republic from within, and ultimately prohibited Weimar from transitioning out of its post-war phase. Weimar's war of memory was the greatest contributing factor to the republic's demise.

My argument is structured into three sections. Section I is an exploration of the fragmentation of memory and understanding of the Great War in Germany between 1914 and 1918. In this section, I will prove my argument through an exploration of primary sources that emphasize how Germans experienced and remembered the "Spirit of 1914," and the differences in how German soldiers understood their participation in the war while they fought in it. Section II will look at the intersection of the war memory and Weimar politics, and how conservatives and the extremist right viewed and used the war's memory to destroy the Weimar Republic. Section III will explore the intersection of the politics surrounding the war's memory and Weimar's artistic realms of art and literature. I will then conclude with an analysis of how and why the memory of the war was so contested and why such contestation was so dangerous to the Weimar Republic.

I. Fragmentation of Memory During the War

The announcement of Germany's participation in the war in the summer of 1914 sparked an enormous spirit of unification within the country. Public festivals accompanied press announcements of the imminent march towards war. Armed with patriotic songs and the waving of flags, men and women gathered in public squares, on street corners, and around kiosks to celebrate in the exhilaration of the diplomatic crisis.²⁰ A photo by an unknown photographer dated August 1, 1914 shows a large gathering of Berliners in a square surrounding a portrait of the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph I.²¹ The men in the crowd lifted their hats to the Emperor to exemplify their support for their Austrian ally and their excitement about Germany's

²⁰ Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918*, 13.

²¹ See Figure 1.

participation in the burgeoning conflict.²² This sentiment is mirrored in *Mein Kampf*. Adolf Hitler, the future leader of the Nazi Party, remarked on the pervasive sense of joy that overtook him upon the war's declaration, "those hours appeared like the redemption from the annoying moods of my youth.... overwhelmed by impassionate enthusiasm, I had fallen on my knees and thanked Heaven out of my overflowing heart that it had granted me the good fortune of being allowed to live in these times."²³ Excitement for the war was not limited to extreme nationalists. Ernst Troeltsch, a liberal theologian and a member of the German Democratic Party, observed that "under this incredible pressure German life melted in that indescribable wonderful unity of sacrifice, brotherhood, belief, and certainty of victory which was, and is, the meaning of the unforgettable August."²⁴ August of 1914 would be remembered throughout the war and the years of the Weimar Republic, but its meaning was not unified.

What would later be referred to as the "Spirit of 1914" had overtaken the country, and this immediate sense of national duty and consciousness would frame public understanding and memory of the war's meaning for years to come. Kaiser Wilhelm II addressed this feeling of unity when he spoke on the balcony of the royal palace on August 1, 1914, to celebrate the beginning of the war:

Should there be battle, all political parties will cease to exist! I, too, have been attacked by one party or another. That was in times of peace. It is now forgiven with all my heart. I no longer think in terms of parties or confessions; today we are all German brothers and only German brothers. If our neighbors want it no other way, if our neighbors do not grant us peace, then I hope to God that our good German sword will emerge victorious from this hard battle.²⁵

²² "Enthusiasm and Sympathy for Austria on the Streets of Berlin, August 1, 1914, in German History in Documents and Images, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=2288.

²³ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 1925 in German History in Documents and Images, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=817.

²⁴ Ernst Troeltsch, *Der Kulturkrieg* (Berlin 1915), 25-26, in *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth and Mobilization in Germany* by Jeffrey Verhey, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 5.

²⁵ "The Kaiser Speaks from the Balcony of the Royal Palace (August 1, 1914)," German History in Documents and Images, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=815."

The Kaiser emphasized the feeling of unity that permeated Germany, and particularly how in this time of crisis German identity overshadowed all other religious, social, or political affiliations that had caused discussion within German society. The Kaiser also instilled, though subtly, another prominent German interpretation of the war in his reference to Germany's neighbors and their treatment of the German nation. He placed the burden of ending the war on every nation except Germany, insinuating that Germany's declaration of war was an act of self-defense and non-aggression. This declaration categorized Germany as the non-guilty party, which the German population internalized so fully that it believed Germany had no responsibility for the consequences of the conflict. This perception of the war would permeate German opinions even after its end in 1918, and influence the post-war international environment, particularly with the Treaty of Versailles. While the Kaiser's emphasis on a national unity was a product of the governmental tactic to spark support for the war effort, it also reflected an experience that many Germans shared in the summer of 1914.

While the "Spirit of 1914" was prevalent in the hearts of many, and became a beacon of hope that many clung to, its popularity should not suggest that Imperial Germany was united. In *Imperial Germany and the Great War: 1914-1918*, Roger Chickering emphasizes the political, social, and cultural disunity that Germany suffered when the war broke out. He remarked that the premise of the "Spirit of 1914" "was the involvement of all Germans in a great national exertion. It implied as well, however, an equitable sharing of both the burdens and rewards of this endeavor. Once these expectations were shown to be empty, the 'Spirit of 1914' took on the aura of an elusive fantasy, a painful reminder of the idealism that had reigned in the first hour."²⁶ As Germany became acquainted with the horrors of modern combat, and the painful burden that

²⁶ Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War*, 17.

participation in total war required, the momentary euphorically-charged emotions of the summer soon faded away. In his novel, *Class of 1902*, Ernst Glaeser reflects on the situation at the home front, specifically, the hunger he experienced as a boy. At a farm he stayed at, gendarmes checked the quantities of grain that were threshed, and “confiscated all the harvest. The farmers hated them as much as they had hated the French in 1914; even more, for they weren’t able to shoot them. The word ‘enemy’ now meant gendarmes.”²⁷ Ernst noted that by 1917, “we hardly mentioned the war, all our talk was of lack of food.”²⁸ The ephemeral unification of all Germans for a common cause and hope dissipated as domestic suffering developed.

The hopes of 1914 were replaced by a disillusionment that was heightened by the fragmentation of experience, and disagreement over meaning the war presented. In 1924, Kurt Tucholsky, a German-Jewish journalist and satirist, meditated on the aftermath of the “Spirit of 1914:”

The wave of drunkenness which overtook the country ten years ago has left behind many hung-over people who know no other cure for their hangover than to become drunk again. They have learned nothing. Today the spiritual foundation on which Germany rests is no different from that when it was founded. No spiritual experience has touched the country, for the war was none. It changed bodies into cadavers, but it left the spirit completely untouched.²⁹

Ten years after the outbreak of the First World War, Tucholsky criticized the continued existence of a misguided German populace that continued to invoke the “Spirit of 1914” as a holy ideal without truly understanding its costly implications. For Tucholsky, the spirit existed as nothing short of unrealized desires. Later, the hope that the birth of the republic instilled within

²⁷ Ernst Glaeser, *Class of 1902*, Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2008, 289.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Kurt Tucholsky, “The Spirit of 1914” published in *Die Weltbühne*, August 7, 1924, in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 20.

Germany's populace would take on the same bitter sting that the "Spirit of 1914" held, as it too could only frustrate lofty and idealized expectations.

The unification that the "Spirit of 1914" seemed to offer shattered and fragmented as men marched to battle. This fragmentation is apparent in how frontline soldiers experienced the war, and how they perceived these experiences. The war letters of German students who volunteered to fight highlight these variances in memory. Jerry Palmer, former Professor of Communications at London Metropolitan University U.K., argues that in letters "we find divergent ways of understanding and representing the war.... we [also] see different understandings of the purpose and overall meaning of war, independent of individual experiences of it."³⁰ Such divergences, are, therefore, multifaceted, as they encompass both the individual and collective realms of memory, which were politically strained at the war's end.

Letters written by soldiers during their time at the front or in battle attest to the nuances of individual experience and general attitudes towards the war. No one nation possessed a homogenous army of physically and mentally flawless male warriors who glorified the justice of war. This reality was difficult for Germany to accept, as the Imperial government promoted traditional, romanticized depictions of its soldiers. The dichotomy between soldiers' interpretations of the war emphasizes this reality. Twenty-three-year-old Franz Blumenfeld, a student of Law at Freiburg, wrote to his mother while on the train to the front on September 24th, 1914. He attempts to explain to her why he volunteered for the war:

[I]t was not from any enthusiasm for war in general, nor because I thought it would be a fine thing to kill a great many people or otherwise distinguish myself. On the contrary, I think that war is a very, very evil thing, and I believe that even in this case it might have been averted by a more skillful diplomacy. But, now that it has been declared, I think it is a matter of course that one should feel oneself so much a member of the nation that one

³⁰ Jerry Palmer, *Memories from the Frontline: Memoirs and Meaning of the Great War from Britain, France and Germany*, London: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2018, 5.

must unite one's fate as closely as possible with that of the whole.... For what counts is always the readiness to make a sacrifice, not the object for which the sacrifice is made.³¹

In his explanation, Franz expresses the duality of his own personal interpretation of the war.

First, his moral convictions classify the war as monstrous and wrong. Yet, the intensity of his duty to the Fatherland challenges his own internal morality. Although disgusted by the prospects of fighting in a war he vehemently opposed, his national duty to participate and fight for Germany overshadowed his personal and moral convictions. Franz's sense of national responsibility yet simultaneous hatred of the callous, inhumane war presents a fragmented interpretation of his experience in the conflict. This conflict within Franz shows how opposing interpretations of the war were not limited to any specific realm. Soldiers like Franz could oppose the war internally and still participate in it. The war, then, had no common, agreed upon meaning in any realm.

One month later Franz was in Northern France, and on October 14th, 1914, he wrote in fear of the war's negative influence on his personhood and faith in humanity. He was largely unmoved by the brutal realities he had to endure such as the harsh environmental factors of dirt, grime, and mud, and the constant presence of dead and wounded men. He writes:

the pain of all that is not nearly so keen or lasting as one imagined it would be. Of course that is partly due to the fact that one knows one can't do anything to prevent it. But may it not at the same time be a beginning of a deplorable callousness, almost barbarity, or how is it possible that it gives me more pain to bear my own loneliness than to witness the sufferings of so many others? Can you understand what I mean? What is the good of escaping all the bullets and shells, if my soul is injured?³²

Franz was faced with the task of justifying his participation in a cataclysmic event that was required of him by their homeland, but would chip away at his most human virtues. This was the

³¹ Franz Blumenfeld, letter to his mother, 24 September 1914, in *German Students' War Letters*, edited by Philipp Witkop, translated by A. F. Wedd, Philadelphia: First Pine Street Books, 2002, 19-20.

³² Franz Blumenfeld, letter, 14 October 1914 (in Northern France), in *German Students' War Letters*, 20-21.

price that many young German volunteers paid. Distressed at the rapid rate of his adjustment to the external horrors of the Great War, Franz questions the point of returning from an event that was destroying the best parts of himself. For Franz, war stripped men of their humanity and virtues, instead of enlightening them. Yet, not all men agreed with this interpretation of war's consequences.

Blumenfeld's sentiment, therefore, contrasts with another German soldier's perception of the war. Hero Hellwhich was a twenty-year-old German infantryman who appreciated war for the virtues it produced. In a letter to his parents, Hero stated, "It is not true that war hardens people's hearts. Anybody who comes back hardened, must have been hard to start with. The effect of war is much more that of purifying and deepening. One thanks God every day that one is allowed to go on living."³³ Hero's conception of war clashes with Franz's. While they both appreciate the necessity of their participation for the sake of the Fatherland, Hero romantically and perhaps naïvely praises war for its ability to 'cleanse' its participants. Hero's view of war aligned with the traditional conservative praise of fighting and violence. Hero's glorification of the Great War would be used during and after 1918 by the right to justify Germany's participation in a failed war and to dominate Weimar's debate on memory.

As the war raged on and domestic hardships continued to mount, political consensus on the war's meaning splintered. In the August days, the "Spirit of 1914" promised a victory and a coalescence of German citizens that made the war difficult to oppose. The fervor of the nation was palpable, and difficult to challenge. As Chickering noted, the war's lack of collective meaning extended to opposition of the conflict, and dissent "was plagued...by its own

³³ Hero Hellwhich, undated letter, in *Letters from the Front*, selected and edited by John Laffin, London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd London, 1973, page 69.

conceptual ambiguities.”³⁴ Thus, conflicting opinions of opposition to the war rested on differing conceptions of the conflict, which challenged any immediate form of large-scale resistance in 1914. Resistance formed in the later years of the war around “‘bread-and-butter’ grievances, such as prices, shortages of food and fuel, working conditions, and censorship.”³⁵ Domestic suffering came to the forefront of the political conversation about the war, but it needed to align with established organizations before it could hope to wield any significant opposition.

In May 1916, labor demonstrators protested in Berlin and demanded bread, freedom and peace. One demonstrator, Karl Liebknecht, climbed an elevated surface and yelled, “Down with the war! Down with the government!” and was promptly arrested and later imprisoned.³⁶ Liebknecht was quickly identified as a martyr, and the political implications of his protest aligned industrial strikes with war protests from 1916 to 1918. Cries against the war and for an immediate peace were soon accompanied by demands for domestic democratic reform. The result was the unification of the Catholic Party, the Progressives, and the Majority Social Democratic Party, which together possessed a majority in the Reichstag and on July 19, 1917 passed the “Peace Resolution.” The “Peace Resolution” sought peace and reconciliation, and denounced annexations of land and general social oppression.³⁷ Most importantly, “it signaled a major rift in the domestic consensus that had born the war, and it threatened a constitutional crisis should the majority on the left refuse to vote additional war credits.”³⁸ The Reichstag’s

³⁴ Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918*, 151.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid, 156.

³⁷ Ibid, 164.

³⁸ Ibid.

“Peace Resolution” officially presented a meaning of the war that rivaled the mythical “Spirit of 1914” interpretation.

General Erich Ludendorff, Supreme Commander of the German Army, lashed out against the Reichstag’s formal declaration of support for peace, which threatened his own desires of a military victory. In response, German troops and the home front were subjected to programs of patriotism to “reinvigorate the vocabulary of patriotism as the governing interpretive medium of the war.”³⁹ One facet of this educational sanction was Ludendorff’s formation of the “German Fatherland Party” in September 1917.⁴⁰ The purpose of the Fatherland Party was to provide an organization that acted as a tangible representation of patriotic desires for victory, and to critique the Reichstag’s “Peace Resolution.” Germany had entered into a war of ideals that would evolve and take new shapes with Weimar’s birth in 1918.

II. The Debate Around Memory: Politics

In 1914, widespread German belief that Germany would win World War I quickly and without heavy losses guaranteed that the legacy of defeat would be difficult, if not impossible for many Germans to bear and would immediately spark a debate within Weimar. The German army steadily collapsed between August and September of 1918, and between 750,000 and 100,000 soldiers attempted to evade further service through feigned illness or surrender. These developments ensured that by October, the German army was in full retreat.⁴¹ Despite such developments, the public continued to believe that Germany could achieve victory. Thus, Ludendorff’s announcement on September 29th that the war had been lost and the government’s

³⁹ Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918*, 165.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid, 186-187.

next step was to negotiate an armistice shocked both the civilian population and the soldiers still in battle.⁴² German politicians were forced to cope with defeat by any means possible.

One facet of the discussion about Germany's loss was rooted in beliefs surrounding the military's viability in the war's final days. A *Reichstag* Subcommittee was formed to investigate the collapse of the military in 1918. Albrecht Philipp of the conservative German National People's Party or DNVP, served as the German National chair of the subcommittee, and he directly addressed what he claimed was the "sabotage" of the war effort, which included shirking, desertion to the enemy, mutiny, and strikes. Philipp stated that shirking was "felt both at home and in the field. At home it took the shape of applications for exemption. It is of course difficult to give exact figures here. During the war the public frequently complained of the numbers of exemptions demanded by the Jews.... there is no doubt that this fact influenced the mentality of those at the front."⁴³ Philipp's scapegoating of German Jews ignores the shirking of military duty by non-Jewish Germans, which would have outweighed that of Jews. In blaming Jews specifically, Philipp also contributed to the development of the "Stab-in-the-Back Myth" adopted by the right, which blamed Jews for the war loss. Philipp's statements suggest that as a conservative, he too held popular nationalistic beliefs that Jews shirked their duties and thus catalyzed Germany's loss. The anti-Semitic narrative that Philipp promotes is a direct response to the German military's loss of the war at the hands of Hindenburg and Ludendorff. As a conservative who supported Imperial Germany's war aims, Philipp's claims of subversion and sabotage of the military reflect a blatant attempt to promote anti-Semitism and deflect the

⁴² Ibid, 187.

⁴³ "Dr. Philipp on Sabotage of the War Effort" in *The Stab-in-the-Back Myth and the Fall of the Weimar Republic: A History in Documents and Visual Sources* edited by George S. Vascik and Mark R. Sadler, New York: Bloomsbury, 68.

burden of failure from the German Supreme Command so it could retain a semblance of authority.

Accompanying the question of sabotage in the post-war political debate was the question of whether Germany could have realistically continued to fight in November of 1918, a large area of contestation that further fragmented collective memory and meaning of the war. Retired general and conservative, Hermann von Kuhl, worked with the *Reichstag* subcommittee to investigate the German military's collapse. To the question of whether the German Army could have continued the fight in November, Kuhl answered yes. He acknowledged the general impacts of the exhaustion of the army in numbers and morale, but ultimately credited the downfall of the army to "pacifist, international, anti-militaristic endeavors and the revolutionary undermining of the Army conducted from the interior of the country."⁴⁴ He explicitly named the Independent Social Democrats as perpetrators of such agitations. Kuhl's testimony is a defense of the commanders of the German army and an attempt to discredit the participants of the revolution, which reflects his conservative background and high-ranking military service. While Kuhl addressed the limitations of an army that had been fighting for four years, he placed the blame for Germany's loss at the hands of the revolution. This undermined the stability of the Weimar Republic by claiming that its birth was the catalyst of Germany's defeat in World War I. This was a criticism that conservatives and the radical right would continue to promote to attack the republic.

Claims that Germany could continue the fight through 1918 were contrasted with assessments that Germany was at its breaking point. Simon Katzenstein, a *Reichstag* deputy and Majority Social Democratic publicist, gave a deposition that challenged the statements given by

⁴⁴ "Could we have kept on Fighting in the Autumn?" in *The Stab-in-the-Back-Myth*, edited by George S. Vascik and Mark R. Sadler, 72.

Albrecht Philipp. Katzenstein argued that revolutionary ideas gained success because of the general tension and exhaustion participation in the war fostered.⁴⁵ He agreed that shirking and desertion were explicitly connected with such exhaustion, but refuted Philipp's sole blame of Jews and revolutionaries stating:

It would require an intensive investigation that goes beyond superficial anecdotal evidence to determine how much shirking went on as the result of personal relationship and bribery. This is particularly true in the case of the superficial rumors that Jews shirked service more than other groups. The same could be said of similar accusations against civil servants, landowners, and some members of the officer corps.⁴⁶

Katzenstein criticized the conservative and nationalist narrative that Philipp promoted for its explicit blame of a vulnerable minority group, and inability to address Imperial Germany's failure. This criticism reflects Katzenstein's support for the republic and is an explicit challenge of the use of shirking to discredit the republic's supporters.

Like Katzenstein, Herbert Corey, a correspondent for *The Washington Evening Star*, recognized the critical military situation, and refuted the nationalist attempt to paper it over with fanciful claims of victory. In 1919, Corey, accompanied by other correspondents, observed the German Army in its retreat, and noted how "now and then an under officer repeated the one tenet of that dangerous cult which is gaining ground in Germany...which is 'the German armies have never been defeated.' I do not doubt that this was dictated from the general staff.... But the very men who repeated it knew that it was essentially false.... 'We were finished.' they said. 'Kaput. We could do no more.'"⁴⁷ Here, Corey observed a momentous development in the German post-war order. Paradoxically, some defeated and demobilizing soldiers uttered the lie that the

⁴⁵ "Majority Social Democrat Simon Katzenstein Refutes the Kuhl-Philipp Thesis" in *The Stab-in-the-Back-Myth*, edited by George S. Vascik and Mark R. Sadler, 73.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 73.

⁴⁷ "Herbert Corey on the State of the German Army in Retreat, January 24, 1919," in *The Stab-in-the-Back-Myth*, edited by George S. Vascik and Mark R. Sadler, 74-75.

German Army had *not* been defeated in the field, while their comrades simultaneously admitted that such claims were preposterous. Interpretations of defeat conflicted even within the ranks of men who had experienced it. Nationalist claims of victory spread like a whisper through demobilized troops, slowly gaining traction to the point where myth became more desirable than truth. This cult that nationalist circles began to construct as early as 1919 would develop into a potent narrative that attacked the revolution, the Weimar Republic, and any alternative or realistic memory of the war.

Nationalist circles used their cult of memory that proclaimed a German victory to attempt to dismantle the Weimar Republic before it had fully been established. One tactic that conservatives adopted to bolster their cult of memory was to blame the revolution for Germany's defeat. Conservative Albrecht Philipp again inserted himself into the narrative, and claimed, "The revolution deprived us of the last remains of our power of resistance and delivered us defenseless into the hands of the enemy at the very moment when Herr Scheidemann was announcing from the steps of the *Reichstag* that the German people had been victorious all along the line."⁴⁸ Philipp expressed the popular nationalist sentiment that the revolution corrupted and undermined the morale of the military, and effectively stabbed the German army and government in the back, ensuring defeat. Philipp's assertion that revolutionaries intervened at the very moment that Germany could have been victorious was an ingenious rhetorical tactic that simultaneously strengthened the nationalist narrative and muddled the reality the German army faced in 1918. Although Germany was teetering on the edge of a brutal defeat, the revolution and the dismantlement of the monarchy presented an opportunity to deny Germany's defeat and possibly restore the nation to its former conservative, monarchical glory. An internal lack of

⁴⁸ "Dr. Philipp on the Revolution as the Cause of Military Collapse," in *The Stab-in-the-Back-Myth*, edited by George S. Vascik and Mark R. Sadler, 84.

consensus on Germany's military situation and experience during and immediately after the war ensured that there would be no agreement on an overall analysis of the war's meaning for many years. And, if there had been any chance of such consensus, it was quickly destroyed by international developments with the Allies.

As the Weimar Republic began to rise unsteadily to its feet, the great powers negotiated a peace that would establish a new European order. Domestic dissent was exacerbated by what was perceived as ill-treatment of a tattered, war-torn Germany by the victors. Germany's representatives came to the table with hopes that Wilson's Fourteen Points would dominate discussion and that a revival of a strong Germany was a goal that coincided with America's wishes.⁴⁹ Wilson's Fourteen Points, which championed unselfish peace terms, alluded to the possibility of lenient negotiations, that would ensure the creation of a new world order that was compatible with democracy.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, the German representatives possessed severely misguided expectations of the allied powers. Public opinion of Germany in France and Great Britain was not cordial in the least. Great Britain's Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, based his 1918 reelection campaign on the slogan, 'Hang the Kaiser!' and promoted a trial of the Kaiser, blaming him for the war.⁵¹ At Versailles, the German delegation walked blindly into a Charybdis. *The Times* reported that the German foreign minister Count Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau arrived with a delegation of eight others, and "their behaviour on their arrival is the talk of Paris. They seem to have expected to have perfect liberty of movement during their stay at Versailles."⁵² When stopped by a policeman for leaving the bounds of a park, Baron von Lersner and Herr Warburg "indignantly protested that Allied officers in Germany were allowed

⁴⁹ Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018, 34.

⁵⁰ Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918*, 188.

⁵¹ "Macdonald Renews War on Lloyd George" in *The New York Times*, May 28, 1929, 6.

⁵² "Germans and the Terms" in *The Times*, April 29, 1919.

to go about anywhere in uniform,”⁵³ clearly misunderstanding the power dynamics between their nations. Additionally, many of the delegates “brought golf clubs with them, which suggests that they expect not only to have plenty of freedom but also plenty of time to spend at Versailles.”⁵⁴ These strange occurrences emphasize the awkwardness that surrounded the peace talks, and the German assumption that they were, in a sense, on equal footing with the Allies. Unfortunately, Germany had sent men of a pre-World War I political world to negotiate with nations that were irrevocably changed by the war. As Weitz noted, when “Brockdorff-Rantzau [sporting] a monocle and a haughty manner, he aroused the Allies’ worst images of aristocratic, militaristic Germany.”⁵⁵ Golf clubs and monocles signify that the German delegates viewed the peace talks with levity and an assumption of equality that would only deepen the blow of the peace terms and catalyze catastrophic consequences within Weimar.

The announcement of the peace terms shocked the German delegation. As the German press obtained and published the details of the treaty, a feeling of disbelief shook the nation. The terms imparted what many Germans perceived as significant losses. As Peukert noted, when studying the significance of the Treaty of Versailles it is important to distinguish “between the psychological burdens which Versailles imposed and the real effects of the peace treaty.”⁵⁶ Germany lost the territories of Alsace-Lorraine, large parts of Posen and West Prussia, the Memel region, and control over Upper Silesia and the Saar, as well as all its colonies.⁵⁷ Although, such losses appear vast, they were essentially valueless.⁵⁸ The reduction of the military, navy, and air force followed. Germany could not mobilize under any circumstances,

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 34.

⁵⁶ Peukert, 42.

⁵⁷ Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 35.

⁵⁸ Peukert, 44.

and in Part V of the treaty, the Allies dictated that the “army must not comprise more than seven divisions of infantry and three divisions of cavalry”⁵⁹ with no more than “6 battleships...6 light cruisers, 12 destroyers, [and] 12 torpedo boats.”⁶⁰ Loss of territory and military prowess was insurance for the Allies, a control mechanism that ensured Germany would not attempt to remobilize its forces and continue the war. One consequence of Part V of the treaty for Weimar was the new government’s need for a police force. The Social Democratic government was forced to rely instead on the Freikorps for armed protection and enforcement of laws, paramilitary bands that identified with the extreme right, and were ideologically opposed to the values of the republic.⁶¹

Germany’s forced reduction of her forces was fodder for German nationalists and the press, but even more humiliating was Part VIII of the treaty, which detailed the reparations clauses. The domestic debate over the reparations clauses and Article 231 would slowly tear Weimar apart in the coming years. Many considered the treaty to be a diktat that was forcefully imposed by the Allies without any consent from Germany, and referred to it as such. The reparations clauses sparked a new hostility in Weimar’s conversations about the war’s memory. The treaty declared, “Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.”⁶² The “war-guilt clause” was, in the eyes of Great Britain, the United States, and France, a justification for their demand for reparations. Peukert claimed that this

⁵⁹ Part V of the Treaty of Versailles in *Inside Hitler’s Germany: A Documentary History of Life in the Third Reich*, edited by Benjamin Sax and Dieter Kuntz, Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1992, 48.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 49.

⁶¹ Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 97.

⁶² “The Treaty of Versailles: The Reparations Clauses,” in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 8.

clause was a direct product of the influence of the “Spirit of 1914.”⁶³ It is notable that the “Spirit of 1914” produced a general belief that losses caused by the war would be rectified by massive victory and this belief extended to all participating nations. The harsh realities of four years of mobilization induced the Allies to demand ‘the spoils of triumph’⁶⁴ and once this was combined with a violent public sentiment towards Germany, and cries for ‘Hang the Kaiser!’, Germany’s guilt, at least in the eyes of the victors, was solidified.

The republican government and Constitutional Convention signed the treaty, but as a result, all of Weimar’s first government resigned.⁶⁵ Even the first chancellor under the Constitutional Convention and member of the Social Democratic Party, Philipp Scheidemann, protested the treaty. He “cried out that all Germans, from whatever group (*Stamm*) or state (*Land*), stood together: ‘We are of one flesh and one blood, and whoever tries to separate us cuts with a murderous knife into the living body of the German people.’”⁶⁶ Despite such nationalistic rhetoric, Germany ultimately had no choice but to sign or endure a resumption of the war and an Allied invasion. The Weimar Republic was months old and had to assume international responsibility for Imperial Germany’s war, which would taint the republic irrevocably in the eyes of the Allied victors and its own citizens. While the government ultimately signed the treaty and its supporters stood by this decision, conservatives and members of the extreme right would never accept the humiliation of the *Diktat*. Instead, they would use it as political ammunition against the republic in the coming debate over the Great War’s memory.

Domestic German reactions to the peace terms were hostile and catalyzed a violent national discussion about the war and its meaning. Anger over the terms of the treaty and the

⁶³ Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, 42-43.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 43.

⁶⁵ Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 37.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 36.

negative international perception of Germany they promoted resulted in a momentary unification of republican supporters and the most conservative of the German *Reichstag*. Unfortunately, while many liberals, including the chancellor, Scheidemann, could denounce the Treaty of Versailles alongside the right, unification of conservative and leftist outrage was ephemeral.⁶⁷ After the treaty had been signed and the government was re-instated under President Friedrich Ebert, member of the liberal Social Democratic party, supporters of the Weimar Republic who continued to critique the treaty subtly undermined its legitimacy. Anger moved to an alternative, often rhetorical realm. Philosopher, theologian, and defender of the republic Ernst Troeltsch remained stalwart in his opposition to Germany's acceptance of responsibility.⁶⁸ Troeltsch was a member of the German Democratic Party, which had joined the KPD, SPD, and Catholic Center Party to form the Weimar Coalition and demand democracy in 1917. In "The Dogma of Guilt," Troeltsch analyzed the roots of the guilt clause and provided an explanation for its existence. Troeltsch asserted:

This peace, while presenting itself as a court of inquisition, is also an imperialist monstrosity made possible by the deceit of the Fourteen Points and by Germany's voluntary disarmament. It is reminiscent of the way Rome once proceeded against Carthage. The German counterproposals to this peace acknowledged the legitimate demands for reconstruction assistance for severely damaged France and Belgium.... Instead, the response to them was: the heretic is to be burned.⁶⁹

Troeltsch's perception of Germany's international plight was a common opinion throughout Germany. His diction bears notable historical and political allusions that are meant to incite outrage at the Allied treatment of Germany. He casts Great Britain, France, and the United States as inquisitors in a court whose final assessment of logical German counterproposals is to

⁶⁷ Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 36.

⁶⁸ *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, edited by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, 6.

⁶⁹ Ernst Troeltsch, "The Dogma of Guilt" June 19, 1919 in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 12.

‘burn the heretic.’ In Troeltsch’s analysis, Germany’s only responsibility in the situation is its folly for voluntarily disarming. This analysis by a supporter of the republic was problematic because it promoted hatred of the treaty and contributed to the right’s narrative. Troeltsch implies that history will repeat itself, and as Rome once ostracized and then razed Carthage, so too will the victors decimate Germany. This popular, bitter domestic response treated the peace as a *Diktat*, and was used by the conservatives and extremist right to destroy the Weimar Republic by attacking its credibility.

While hatred for the Treaty of Versailles was often used by the right, the Stab-in-the-Back Myth was the primary tool of the nationalist and conservative war narrative to undermine the legitimacy of the republic. The Stab-in-the-Back Myth, or *Dolchstoßlegende* in German, quickly gained traction at the end of the First World War as an explanation for why Germany was defeated in November of 1918, and who was to blame for its defeat. In *The Stab-in-the-Back-Myth and the Fall of the Weimar Republic*, historians George S. Vascik and Mark R. Sadler argue that Germany’s defeat in the fall of 1918 was ‘psychologically devastating,’ and this shock necessitated an explanation. Alternative conceptions of Germany’s fate and lived experiences resulted in differing narratives, but at the heart of many was the feeling of betrayal. One extreme interpretation claimed that Imperial Germany, the army, and the navy, had all been stabbed in the back by domestic agitators, while another extreme asserted that the proletarian revolution was betrayed by Friedrich Ebert and the Majority Social Democrats, and the revolution had not accomplished enough.⁷⁰ Conflicting narratives of betrayal would compete for dominance in Weimar’s political quagmire, and although the *Dolchstoß* housed multiple interpretations, the nationalist narrative became most prevalent and popular.

⁷⁰ George S. Vascik and Mark R. Sadler, *The Stab-in-the-Back-Myth and the Fall of the Weimar Republic: A History in Documents and Visual Sources*, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, 1.

Nationalist supporters of the Stab-in-the-Back-Myth ironically credited its birth to an English general, rather than anyone of their own parties. Major General Sir Frederick Barton Maurice, a career military officer, served as Director of Military Operations of the Imperial General Staff in London in 1914 and, according to his German nationalist supporters, possessed knowledge of the military abilities of the German army.⁷¹ Maurice was, therefore, considered to be a credible outside source who could accurately comment upon Germany's undefeated status in the Great War. The trouble began with a simple publication in the *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, a conservative democratic paper, on December 18, 1918, that-claimed General Maurice had written in the *Daily News*, "The civilian population stabbed the Germany army to death from behind. The behavior of the sailors of the German fleet was disreputable. They chose to surrender their ships to the enemy, rather than to defy death. They were the ones who saved Paris."⁷² The correspondent writing this piece blatantly misinterpreted his source, a report on General Maurice's articles in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, that confusingly made it unclear whether "Maurice believed that the civilian population stabbed the army in the back or that it was a 'common view' within the British populace and not necessarily shared by Maurice."⁷³ Despite the truth or untruth behind his words, the myth had become an imperative tenet of the Stab-in-the-Back-Myth. The notice gave the myth credibility by placing it in the mouth of General Maurice, and, more importantly, granted nationalists a scapegoat for the failure of their "invincible" German Army. The *Dolchstoßlegende* only needed a reputable German spokesperson to commend it, which it found in the figure of Paul von Hindenburg.

⁷¹ Vascik and Sadler, *The Stab-in-the-Back-Myth*, 94.

⁷² "Deutsche Tageszeitung Notice: 'The Stabbed-in-the-Back German Army,' December 18, 1918," in *The Stab-in-the-Back-Myth* edited by Vascik and Sadler, 95.

⁷³ George S. Vascik and Mark R. Sadler, *The Stab-in-the-Back-Myth and the Fall of the Weimar Republic*, 98.

Field Marshall Paul von Hindenburg and General Erich Ludendorff served as the two leaders of Germany's Supreme Military Command from 1916 until the end of the First World War. At the end of September 1918, Ludendorff was aware of Germany's military incapacities and inability to continue the war, and he planned to place responsibility for Germany's defeat on the shoulders of a democratic, civilian government to absolve Imperial Germany and the military of blame for the disastrous conflict.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, Ludendorff was successful, and the Stab-in-the-Back Myth established itself as another chapter in his narrative. In 1919, the Allies insisted that the German government identify leaders of the imperial military and government and try them for war crimes; consequently, the Weimar National Assembly established a committee to investigate war guilt and crimes.⁷⁵ Public interrogations followed, and it was here where the Weimar Republic allowed the *Dolchstoßlegende* to gain traction through testimonies. Hindenburg testified in November of 1919, and stated, "We were constantly concerned whether we would maintain the support of the Home Front until the war could be successfully concluded. At this time the intentional undermining of the army and navy began.... The collapse was inevitable. The revolution was only the capstone. An English General rightly said, 'The German army was stabbed in the back.'"⁷⁶ In this testimony, Hindenburg accomplished what Ludendorff began, and ultimately solidified the nationalist narrative's preferred rhetorical attack of the Weimar Republic.

After Hindenburg's testimony to the *Reichstag* the debate around Germany's national war memory was in full swing. As Vascik and Sadler aptly stated, "[h]is statement solidified the bounds of debate. One either believed Germany's hero that the army was stabbed in the back or

⁷⁴ Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 15.

⁷⁵ Vascik and Sadler, *The Stab-in-the-Back-Myth*, 111.

⁷⁶ "Hindenburg's Testimony" in *The Stab-in-the-Back-Myth*, edited by Vascik and Sadler, 122.

one didn't. Opinions might differ as to the means, timing, and extent of the betrayal, but the nationalist position was now set in concrete."⁷⁷ Hindenburg was a supplement for the national hero Germany lacked in the Kaiser, and his support of the *Dolchstoßlegende* gave it credibility. Representations of the testimony appeared everywhere. A political, anti-Semitic interpretation of the testimony was drawn by cartoonist Werner Hahmann and published in *Kladderadatsch* on November 30, 1919.⁷⁸ In this rendering of the testimony, an elegant, trustworthy Hindenburg pulls back a curtain to reveal a once shielded 'truth' of the war. Behind the curtain, the rifle of a German infantryman has slipped from his grasp as a petite, sneaky woman bearing characteristic derogatory Jewish features, the Social Democratic hat, and the serpent hair of Medusa has impaled him from behind. Notably, the narrative was made more potent by its vagueness. Theoretically, one could place any member of any social class or group in the role of traitor or stabber. In Hahmann's rendition, he promotes anti-Semitic and anti-feminist messages that criticize the republic's inclusive reforms and ideals.

The extremist right contributed greatly to conservative nationalist renditions of Germany's lost war. In *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler ruminates on his war experience and adds to the potency of the Stab-in-the-Back Myth. He blames Marxism for the 1918 Revolution and the collapse of the army, and equates communists with Hebrew corrupters.⁷⁹ Hitler claims that if "twelve or fifteen thousand of these Hebrew corrupters of the people had been held under poison gas...the sacrifice of millions at the front would not have been in vain. On the contrary: twelve thousand scoundrels eliminated in time might have saved the lives of a million real Germans."⁸⁰ Hitler blamed the revolution for Germany's failure, and placed the revolution solely at the hands

⁷⁷ Vascik and Sadler, *The Stab-in-the-Back-Myth*, 126.

⁷⁸ See Figure 2.

⁷⁹ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 133.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 133.

of communists and Jews, aligning his argument with traditional anti-Semitic critiques. His misguided interpretation implies that real Germans had no hand in the revolution that was distinctly German. Hitler's anti-Semitic interpretation of the Stab-in-the-Back Myth was a popular rendition in the nationalist camp. The republic and its supporters were faced with the impossible and daunting task of refuting this narrative.

The right's conception of Germany's betrayal did not go unchallenged. Although the left could not produce any long-lasting and popular counterargument to the right's proposed narrative, many individuals did contest it. The Hamburg Chapter of the Central Association of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith disseminated a flyer in April of 1932 addressed directly to German men and women to combat anti-Semitism within Germany. The text logically and methodically refutes extremist ideas about race and religion as well as misconceptions about Judaism and Marxism.⁸¹ More specifically, the flyer challenges the claim that Jews shirked their war duties and betrayed the nation by stabbing it in the back. It begs the reader to "[c]onsider that a hundred thousand Jewish men stood next to their comrades on the front in the Great War. Among them twelve thousand died for the fatherland. Our slanderers and hatemongers have gone so far as to desecrate the dead."⁸² The flyer brings attention to the monumental number of German Jews who fought for and were loyal to Germany in its time of war. Although reactions to the flyer cannot be known, its existence presented an important counterargument to the agenda of the conservatives and the extremist rights.

Pro-republican narratives about the collective German memory of the First World War were nuanced and relied upon multiple ideals and mediums to counter the right's narrative. One

⁸¹ "The Central Association of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith Flyer, by the Hamburg Chapter" in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 272-274.

⁸² *Ibid*, 275.

such ideal was the association of the end of the war with the German people's liberation. This version of the war narrative necessitated an omission of the reality of German defeat and the Treaty of Versailles, and subsequently glossed over any significant details about the horrors of World War I.⁸³ This technique is seen in a poem that the Majority Social Democratic Party published in *Vorwärts*, a newspaper the party edited:

... There were hardly enough coffins to take all the dead,
 earth had become one mass grave,
 love had died away, reconciliation suffered from a lingering disease,
 hatred was the only master, and this eerie dance of death was
 insanely directed by a scepter.
 ...
 Then suddenly...
 Thrones were deposed. And the people, liberated and without shackles,
 Were quick to raise love and peace to the throne ...
 You finished the battle, the need, serfdom and misery ...
 We will always pronounce you as the year of freedom,
 Of your horrors, we will no longer speak ...⁸⁴

Titled *Farewell to 1918*, this poem acknowledges the destruction the war caused, and defines the conflict as the catalyst to revolution and freedom, rather than a significant defeat. Additionally, the poem identifies Germany's 1918 revolution as a historical phenomenon rather than an action which defines it as an elusive happening that was separate from but beneficial to the people.⁸⁵ In this sense, the author clouds the association of soldier and revolutionary, and the people are transformed into a passive object, essentially disassociated from the acts of revolution that they invoked. *Farewell to 1918* illuminates one limitation of the pro-republican war narrative: its omission of controversial realities to heighten a portrayal of German revolutionary victory which ultimately weakened its effectiveness.

⁸³ Benjamin Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations: Republican War Veterans and Weimar Political Culture*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 25.

⁸⁴ 'Abschied von 1918', *Vorwärts* no. 1, 1 January 1919, translated by Benjamin Ziemann, cited in *Contested Commemorations* by Benjamin Ziemann, 24.

⁸⁵ Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations*, 25.

Another technique that pro-republican narratives adopted was to portray soldiers as victims of both an international violence and an internal German corruption that festered within the upper echelon of the German military and Imperial state. The Great War was described in terms of genocide, and many referred to it explicitly by this definition, and used the word ‘Völkermord,’ which simultaneously defined it as a slaughter and placed blame on its participants. Republican narratives that portrayed frontline soldiers, however, excluded the reality that common German men who had volunteered or been conscripted were also perpetrators of violence.⁸⁶ A poster titled “No More War” advertises a commemoration ceremony on July 31, 1922 for those killed in combat and depicts a battlefield filled with mutilated and dying soldiers who lay beneath a sky illuminated by the presence of three, large united figures.⁸⁷ In the illustration, war becomes the third quasi-character in its own right, but, only its aftermath is depicted. The poster presents war as something that happened to the passive dying soldiers, rather than something that they themselves participated in or waged.

The attempt to separate soldiers from the perpetration of violence in World War I and instead emphasize their suffering muddled the pro-republican narrative and limited its opportunity for success. The separation of soldiers from violence conflicted with the militaristic nature of the Reichsbanner, one of the Weimar Republic’s primary defenders. The Reichsbanner was a group of war veterans founded in Magdeburg in 1924 that burgeoned into one of the republic’s largest mass organizations, and was made up of more than three million members.⁸⁸ In a photograph from October 1924, Reichsbanner members march at a rally in Potsdam in a

⁸⁶ Ibid, 41.

⁸⁷ See Figure 3.

⁸⁸ “The *Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold* at a mass Rally in Potsdam, October 26, 1924” in German History in Documents and Images, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=4030.

unified formation holding German flags and wearing military uniforms.⁸⁹ Their militaristic formation and uniforms clash with pro-republican attempts to counter the rightist narrative of the war by portraying soldiers as victims and omitting violence from their identities. Ultimately, this destabilized the pro-republican narrative. It would be difficult, if not impossible, for a narrative to encompass both the aims of a paramilitary group and a pro-republican rendering of Germany's participation in the First World War that denied violence. This emphasizes one of the characteristic elements of pro-republican war remembrance that Ziemann identified: "the lack of any stable and coherent framework or core institutional platform on which moderate socialists and radical democrats could rely for these purposes."⁹⁰

Although republican supporters did propose an alternative narrative about the war's collective memory, it was riddled with contradictions that ultimately weakened its strength against the right's narrative. In *Contested Commemorations*, Ziemann explores the pro-republican recollections of the Great War and how they supported the Weimar Republic.⁹¹ The largest coalition of war veterans was mobilized by the Social Democrats to establish the Reichsbund of War Disabled, War Veterans and War Dependents in 1917 and the Reichsbanner Black-Red-Gold, a League of Republican Ex-Servicemen formed in 1924, that included members of the Center Party and DDP as well.⁹² Although the members of the Reichsbanner offered an immersive remembrance of the First World War as a defense against right-wing myths, their primary focus on the past ensured that they "tended to neglect or perhaps even to obfuscate Weimar's present future, a temporal marker that was of paramount importance as a

⁸⁹ See Figure 4.

⁹⁰ Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations*, 25.

⁹¹ Ibid, 1.

⁹² Ibid, 3.

motivation for republican activism.”⁹³ Thus, the Reichsbanner was faced with a paradoxical challenge to honor and protect Weimar’s past and simultaneously use this narrative to advance Weimar’s future. Unfortunately for republican supporters, the right was better equipped to successfully meet this challenge because it presented a mythology that denied Germany’s defeat, which was easier for Germans to accept than the reality of the lost war.

The right was more skilled at aligning past myth with present desires, and this is what ultimately made its narrative more popular. Germany had to face the daunting task of transitioning from a society at war to one at peace. One unforeseen implication of the strain that participation in a total war for four years created was a desire for a return to a fictive better time, as Bessel has asserted. This return to Imperial Germany’s golden days, and a need for normalcy was, in the eyes of many, a simultaneous reconstitution of “conventional, patriarchal social and family relationships and [the] re-imposing [of] conservative moral codes.”⁹⁴ Bessel aptly asserted that the social and economic upheavals catalyzed by war and revolution threatened the mass masculinity of German men, and necessitated a reassertion of order and control, particularly in regards to the behavior of women.⁹⁵ Conservatives and the extremist right reacted to this desire by incorporating it into their version of Germany’s war narrative, and ensuring that it was included in their conception of a reformed Germany. This desire to reassert authority was the core of the right’s narrative against the republic, and it was used to emphasize that the Weimar Republic and its supporters could not fulfill this desire. After the political bounds of the war debate were established, it extended to the realms of literature and culture, ensuring that the war’s memory was prevalent in every aspect of society.

⁹³ Ibid, 7.

⁹⁴ Bessel, *Germany after the First World War*, 223.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 239.

III. The Intersection of the Memory of War and The Arts

The debate on memory entered the realm of literature to further fragment any attempt to establish a collective meaning within Weimar. Widespread support for works that romanticized war and works that critiqued it were common. One notable liberal critique of the right's narrative dealt with the romanticization and normalization of war and violence. Traditional romantic views of the military were upheld and propagated throughout Germany to ensure that the German army was known to be prestigious and honorable, but the loss of the war and the inhumanity of modern warfare damaged this image. Some attempted to uphold traditional views through literature. In 1922, Ernst Jünger, a German soldier and author, published "Fire" to promote a glorified version of combat. Jünger illustrates the ideal German soldier and man, and defines them

men forged of steel, whose eagle eyes peer straight over the propeller's whirl, studying the clouds ahead, who...dare the hellish journey through the roar of shell-pitted fields, who, for days on end, approaching a certain death, crouch in encircled nests heaped with corpses, only half alive beneath glowing machine guns. They are the best of the modern battlefield, suffused with the reckless spirit of the warrior, whose iron will discharges in clenched, well-aimed bursts of energy.⁹⁶

Jünger's description emphasizes an idealized masculinity that stems from the possession of a warrior's spirit and hinges on the notion of control. The ideal soldier is a man who can live unperturbed amongst corpses and gunfire, and although he is only 'half alive,' he still manages to retain a certain semblance of control that allows him to rid himself of all emotion. The ideal man and soldier is forged by, and an imitation of, war itself. Jünger's aggressive conception of masculinity was no doubt an aggravated response to the massive mental and physical destruction the war had on Germany's men. The very idea of masculinity had been decimated, and the right sought to reinstate it.

⁹⁶ Ernst Jünger, "Fire" 1922, in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 19.

Erich Maria Remarque, a German veteran of the First World War, condemned normative conceptions of violence in his publication of *All Quiet on the Western Front* in 1929, eleven years after the end of the war. Remarque's masterpiece presented the war from the perspective of those from below, a view that challenged the memoirs of generals and those who peppered the upper ranks of the military.⁹⁷ *All Quiet on the Western Front* tells the story of a group of twenty young German schoolboys who, encouraged by their teachers, volunteered for the war, and one by one are killed until only half of them remain standing in 1918. The narrator, Paul Bäumer plays the simultaneous roles of insider and outsider as he experiences the war and then attempts to make sense of it through the narration. He analyzes his and his comrades' experiences through simple, often biting critiques of the effects of the war and German excitement about it. Near the end of the story, Paul's company commander, Bertnick, is killed and followed by another soldier, Leer, who quickly bleeds to death from a shrapnel wound. Paul remarks, "What use is it to him now that he was so good at mathematics at school?"⁹⁸ Paul and his schoolmates have been consumed by the war to the point that they no longer exist in any other capacity.

A major theme of *All Quiet on the Western Front* is betrayal. Paul reflects on how him and his schoolmates were persuaded by their parents and former school teacher, Kantorek, to enlist in the war. Kantorek marched Paul's entire class to the recruiting office to enlist, and Paul remembers "his eyes shining at us through his spectacles and his voice trembling with emotion as he asked, 'You'll all go, won't you lads?'"⁹⁹ Paul remarks that one of his schoolmates, Josef Behm, was reluctant to enlist, but "it wasn't easy to stay out of it because at that time even our parents used the word 'coward' at the drop of a hat."¹⁰⁰ Behm eventually did enlist under

⁹⁷ Norman Stone, *All Quiet on the Western Front* Introduction, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018, vii.

⁹⁸ Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, 240-241.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 13.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 14.

Kantorek's instruction, and was one of the first from Paul's class to be killed. Paul links this consequence with Kantorek's insistence that his students join the military, and here, Remarque establishes the feeling of betrayal of one generation by another.

The militaristic nature of Wilhelmine society is the true enemy of Paul and his school friends, not the French, British, or American troops they fight. Remarque makes the point that nationalistic Imperial Germany and its proponents led thousands of young men to a slaughter.

Paul laments:

While they went on writing and making speeches, we saw field hospitals and men dying: while they preached the service of the state as the greatest thing, we already knew that the fear of death is even greater. This didn't make us into rebels or deserters, or turn us into cowards – and they were more than ready to use all of those words – because we loved our country just as much as they did, and we went bravely into every attack. But now we were able to distinguish things clearly, all at once our eyes had been opened. And we saw that there was nothing left of their world. Suddenly we found ourselves horribly alone – and we had to come to terms with it alone as well.¹⁰¹

Paul and his comrades experienced a moral bankruptcy and disillusionment at the hands of their parents and school teachers, the very people whose job it was to guide them. This sense of betrayal carries significant political weight, although Remarque makes no allusion to the *Dolchstoßlegende*. In “Erich Maria Remarque and the Weimar Anti-War Novels,” Brian Murdoch places *All Quiet on the Western Front* into the antiwar novel genre, and notes that it was common for such texts to omit the presence of the enemy and emphasize that there must be no more war.¹⁰² In *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the absence of any significant representation of the enemy serves to further emphasize the culpability of the Wilhelmine ruling class in World War I's slaughter. This, combined with the experience that Paul and his comrades undergo, which is consistently marked as meaningless, provides a distinctly political message. While

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 15.

¹⁰² Brian Murdoch, “Erich Maria Remarque and the Weimar Anti-War Novels” in *German Novelists of the Weimar Republic: Intersections of Literature and Politics*, edited by Karl Leydecker, Rochester: Camden House, 2006, 146.

Remarque claims to neither confess nor accuse through his novel, its depiction of war defines it as pacifist and situates it within the liberal antiwar narrative of the Weimar political debate.

Remarque provides an alternative view of the soldier that challenges the one Jünger presents in “Fire” and his book *Storm of Steel*. Paul writes about the horrors of the frontline,

and so we stumble onwards, while into our bullet-ridden, shot-through souls the image of the brown earth insinuates itself painfully, the brown earth with the greasy sun and the dead or twitching soldiers, who lie there as if that were perfectly normal, and who grab at our legs and scream as we try to jump over them. We have lost all feelings for others, we barely recognize each other when somebody else comes into our line of vision, agitated as we are. We are dead men with no feelings, who are able by some trick, some dangerous magic, to keep on running and keep on killing.¹⁰³

Paul’s description asserts that the war has caused more than just physical damage, that him and his comrades possess bullet-ridden, shot-through souls that have been decimated by their experiences. Remarque introduces an unseen dimension to Jünger’s heralding of a soldier’s ability to live dangerously and persevere through tough times. Through Paul, Remarque asserts that it is not with the aid of any mystical iron masculinity or will that men continued to fight, but rather because they too, like the bodies they tread mindlessly over, are dead. Remarque’s critique of the violence of war is a refutation of the rightist narrative that promoted violence as a necessary tenet of masculinity. Like the pro-republican conception of soldiers, Paul and his friends are portrayed as victims. The war had removed their humanity.

Remarque’s novel was both admired and criticized. He prefaces the book, “This book is intended neither as an accusation nor as a confession, but simply as an attempt to give an account of a generation that was destroyed by the war – even those of it who survived the shelling.”¹⁰⁴ Remarque does not attempt to express the literal truth of the war and the events and experiences of its participants, but rather the truth of the feeling of what would be defined by Gertrude Stein

¹⁰³ Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, 102.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

as the Lost Generation. What made the book controversial within Weimar's political realm, however, was the interpretation by many that it *did* attempt to assert some truth. Carl Zuckmayer, a pacifist playwright and author, reviewed the novel in the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* in January 1929, and praised it, writing that for the first time, someone has expressed "what went on in these people, what happened inside, in the mines and sap of the soul, in the blood, in the tissue; and that is why it is the first war book that offers truth."¹⁰⁵ Conservatives, on the other hand, criticized the novel for its 'misrepresentation' of the German army and military command.

While the novel instigated political controversy, the release of the film catalyzed a crisis. The announcement in August 1929 that the production of a film adaptation of *All Quiet* by Universal Pictures Corporation was in the works was ill-received by the political right. In "War, Memory, and Politics: The Fate of the Film *All Quiet on the Western Front*" historian Modris Eksteins describes the history of the film's presentation in Germany and the backlash that ensued, arguing that with the film's release in December, "many of the frustrations and fears, and much hatred and resentment, prevalent in various sectors of German politics and the economy, would converge dramatically on *All Quiet*."¹⁰⁶ On the evening of December 5, 1930 at a 7pm showing of the film, riots and protests organized by the Nazis broke out in the theatre. After scenes of a German retreat were seen, cries from Nazis and their supporters broke out, "'German soldiers had courage. It's a disgrace that such an insulting film was made in America!' And: 'Down with the hunger government which permits such a film!'"¹⁰⁷ The film was stopped, and soon stink bombs, sneeze powder, and white mice were released by Nazis throughout the theatre,

¹⁰⁵ Carl Zuckmayer, "Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*" 1929, in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 23.

¹⁰⁶ Modris Eksteins, "War, Memory, and Politics: The Fate of the Film *All Quiet on the Western Front*, 70.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 71.

accompanied by fights and the Nazi assessment that they were in the presence of a Jewish audience.¹⁰⁸ The outrage stemmed from a claim that the film injured Germany's image, and was part of a 'propaganda war' being waged against Germany by the United States. Consequently, the film was banned on December 11th because of the harms it posed to Germany's image.¹⁰⁹

Consequently, the Nazi party claimed a victory in the "film war" that had been waged over *All Quiet*, while outrage emanated from the liberal and socialist left. The left criticized the government for betraying its own republican ideals and capitulating to the threat of a mob. But while the liberal population of Berlin was outspoken about the result of the "film war," other provinces of the country supported the government's decision.¹¹⁰ Ultimately, no matter how truthful *All Quiet's* portrayal of Germany's experience in the war was, its threat to political stability was greater. The consequence of banning the film was that the government subtly justified the Nazi narrative of the war. In agreeing that the film was harmful to Germany's international image and did not truthfully portray the German war experience, the Weimar Republic legitimized nationalist conceptions of the memory of World War I. And so, the Nazi Party walked away with a small but significant "victory" in its pocket and inched closer to its seizure of power in 1933.

Ernst Friedrich, a writer and outspoken critic of war, contributed to the war debate when he published a photographic narrative of the Great War in protest of the violent ideals the promotion of war instituted within society. In 1924, Friedrich's *War Against War!* was published as part of a larger antimilitarist campaign as German citizens gained knowledge of

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 77.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 77-79.

Germany's organization of the Black *Reichswehr* to secretly rearm itself.¹¹¹ As professor and historian Dora Apel asserted, at the time of *War Against War*'s publication, "the organized pacifist movement was politically contained by the ruling Social Democrats and effectively moribund; war imagery shifted dramatically away from antiwar statements in graphic art and paintings toward heroic imagery in hugely popular patriotic photography albums."¹¹² Friedrich's work was an ambitious attempt to shift the popular support for heroism and re-center the narrative on the inhumane consequences of the First World War. The images he chose to include emphasize the gruesome mutilation and destruction that war causes to men of all nations, religions, and political affiliations.

Friedrich's technique was to heighten the sense of horror at the reality of modern war by presenting photographs in pairs where one celebrated the war and the other presented its horrid truth. He begins with a photo titled "From the August days of 1914 — Enthusiastic . . . for what? . . ."¹¹³ The image shows a mix of young men, some outfitted in military uniforms and others in civilian suits, all marching through the streets of Germany, waving and smiling, holding bouquets and rifles adorned with flowers.¹¹⁴ Uncaptioned, one could mistake the image for one depicting a victorious army returning from war. Friedrich's caption critiques the celebration of the ensuing war that took hold of Germans through the "Spirit of 1914." Its pair finishes the caption with the phrase, ". . .for the 'field of honor.'"¹¹⁵ The second photograph shows an indecipherable number of bodies at the front collected in a mass.¹¹⁶ None of the men are identifiable, their faces covered or too disfigured to tell. The anonymity of the second photo

¹¹¹ Dora Apel, "Cultural Battlegrounds: Weimar Photographic Narratives of War," in *New German Critique*, no 76, 1999, 49.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ernst Friedrich, *War Against War!* page 66.

¹¹⁴ See Figure 5.

¹¹⁵ Friedrich 7.

¹¹⁶ See Figure 6.

heightens its pacifist power, the soldiers could be of any army, nation, or political party.

Friedrich's pairing of the photos emphasizes the inhumanity of the conflict and attempts to contribute to the shaping of Weimar's collective public memory over the war. Apel argues that Friedrich's photographic narrative could not generate an alternative collective memory that was strong enough to oppose the rise of National Socialism.¹¹⁷ This, however, was not the point of Friedrich's work, and no one could anticipate the success that the militaristic political right's narrative would have.

The war debate reached the artistic realm as well. Jay Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* explores the depth of individual and mass bereavement inflicted by the First World War. Käthe Kollwitz was a prominent Berlin artist when the Great War broke out in 1914 and was known as a printmaker and a visual poet. Her son, Peter, volunteered for the war when he was eighteen-years-old, and was killed on October 30, 1914 in Flanders.¹¹⁸ Over the next seventeen years, Kollwitz would dedicate her artwork to Peter in an effort to memorialize him and the thousands of other children lost to the war. Kollwitz finished her project in April 1931, and it was placed in the Belgium cemetery where Peter is buried, adjacent to his grave.¹¹⁹ Her memorial, titled *Die Eltern*, or *The Parents*, is the sculpture of two figures in granite, both on their knees.¹²⁰ *Die Eltern* makes tangible a palpable sense of guilt. Kollwitz and her husband are on their knees to beg for Peter's forgiveness, "to ask him to accept their failure to find a better way, their failure to prevent the madness of war from cutting his life short."¹²¹ Kollwitz's sculpture expresses this guilt masterfully, and this sentiment of remorse adds another, more

¹¹⁷ Apel, 84.

¹¹⁸ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 108.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 109-110.

¹²⁰ See Figure 7.

¹²¹ Ibid, 111.

political dimension to her work. Kollwitz's grief and guilt was heightened because of her original support for the war and encouragement of Peter to participate. This adds a collective meaning to her work that encompasses a larger memory landscape by acknowledging the role of a nation state in bereavement.¹²² Kollwitz attempts to atone for her actions as a mother, and address how her decision fit into the larger narrative of a generation. *Die Eltern* connects to the antiwar narrative and sense of betrayal that was presented by pro-republicans and Erich Maria Remarque in *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Kollwitz's creation was born of her grief, and through this, she atones not only for her and her husband, but the folly of an entire generation that sent their sons to a slaughter.

The element of betrayal and corruption was also addressed in political cartoons. In early April of 1919, George Grosz's sketch of a military doctor and a soldier was published. Grosz was a German artist known for his caricature drawings, and was a member of the Berlin Dada and New Objectivity group.¹²³ At the close of the war, Grosz's work was dominated by satire and themes that addressed Weimar's post-war mood. Grosz's art addressed the betrayal of the revolution, the corruption of those in power, and the brutality of militarism.¹²⁴ His sketch, *Military doctor pronouncing a skeleton "K.V." or active for duty*, provides a biting critique on the role Imperial Germany and its supporters played in the slaughter of World War I. In his sketch, a robust German doctor embraces a rotting corpse while surrounded by military personnel who take notes and comment on the process.¹²⁵ Grosz's sketch is simultaneous

¹²² Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870-1990*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, 97-98.

¹²³ *Grosz/Heartfield: The Artist as Social Critic*, organized by the University Gallery. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1980.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 32.

¹²⁵ See Figure 8.

critique of what the German army had become by 1918, and the role of medical professionals and military officials in its corruption. Grosz's message is clear: German soldiers were dead men walking, even before they reached the front.

IV. Conclusion

The memory of Germany's experience in the First World War was fragmented from the moment war was declared in the summer of 1914. This fragmentation, combined with the loss of the war in 1918, resulted in a lack of public consensus on the war's meaning. This aggravated Weimar's political world, and consequently, the war's memory was used as a tool by the conservatives and the extremist right to wage war against the Weimar Republic. The Treaty of Versailles, the diverse Stab-in-the-Back Myth, and propaganda against Jews, socialists, republicans, and women were used to delegitimize the republic. The left's response, as seen in Ernst Friedrich's photographic narrative, public denouncement of anti-Semitism, and attempts by the Reichsbanner to impart a pro-republican narrative, was inadequate to halt the right's consolidation of power in 1933. Political debate seeped into the realm of literature as well, and the novel and film, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, presents an example of the significance of the war's contestation eleven years after its end in 1918. A collective lack of consensus on the war's meaning was used by the right to dismantle the Weimar republic from within, and instill an authoritarian regime.

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Figure 1: A crowd of Germans gather in Berlin holding the portrait of Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph I to support their ally in the face of a burgeoning conflict with Serbia. Photograph taken by an unknown photographer, dated August 1, 1914 in German History in Documents and Images (GHDI).



Figure 2: Cartoonist Werner Hahmann's interpretation of Hindenburg's testimony in *The Stab-in-the-Back-Myth and the Fall of the Weimar Republic: A History in Documents and Visual Sources* edited by George S. Vascik and Mark R. Sadler.



Figure 3: A poster advertises “No More War” and a July 31, 1922 commemoration ceremony to honor those killed in combat. The commemoration was to take place in Munich. Poster in Benjamin Ziemann’s *Contested Commemorations*.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 102-00777
Foto: Pahl, Georg | 20. Oktober 1924

Figure 4: Reichsbanner members march at a rally in Potsdam in militaristic formation holding German flags. Photograph taken in October 1924, in German History in Documents and Images.

Uit de Augustusdagen 1914 – Geestdriftig . . . waarvoor? . . .

Aus den Augusttagen 1914. – Begeistert . . . wofür? . . .



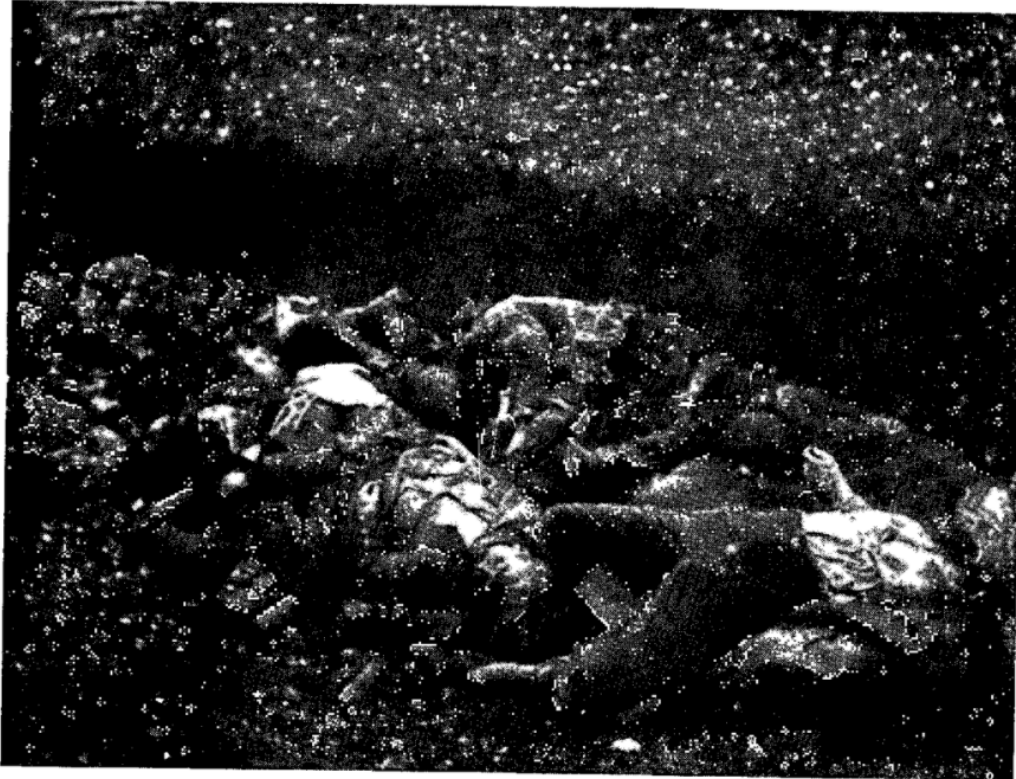
From the August days of 1914 – Enthusiastic . . . for what? . . .

Des jour d'août en 1914 – Enthousiasmés . . . pour quoi? . . .

Figure 5: German soldiers march to war in August 1914, in Ernst Friedrich's *War Against War!*

... voor het „veld van eer.“

... für das „Feld der Ehre“.



... for the “field of honor”.

... pour le « champ d'honneurs. »

Figure 6: The mass grave of unidentifiable soldiers on the battlefield, in Ernst Friedrich's *War Against War!*



Figure 7: *Die Eltern* by Käthe Kollwitz, Roggevelde German war cemetery, Vladslo, Belgium, image in Jay Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*.

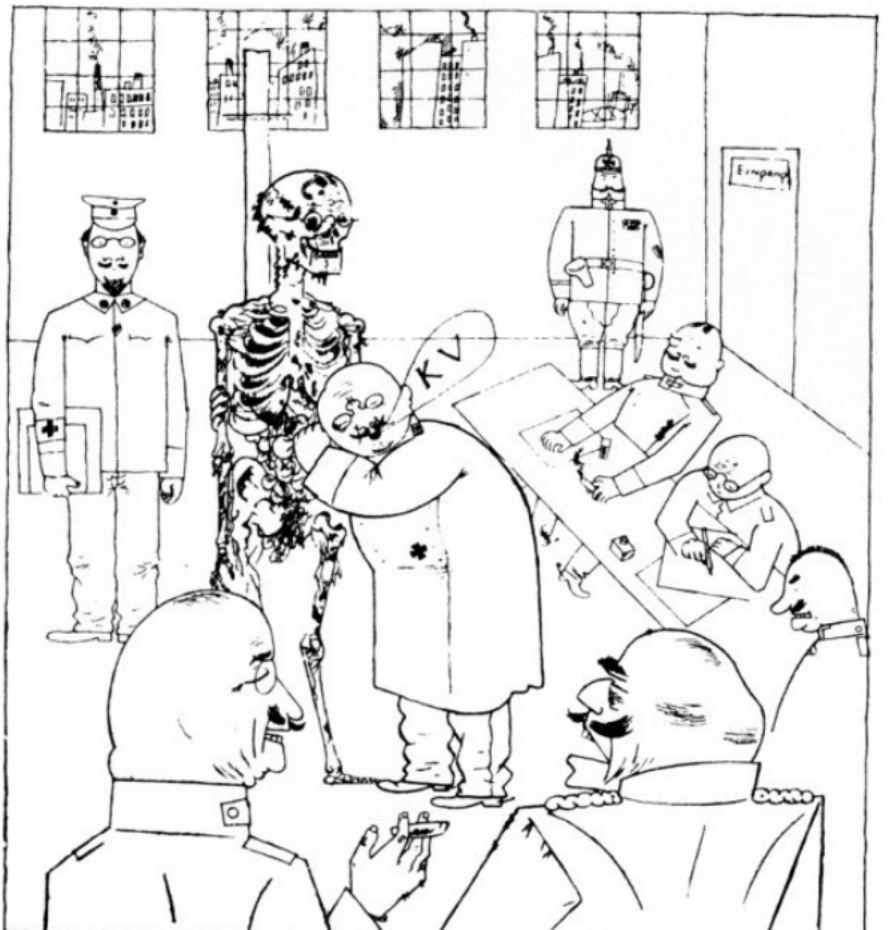


Figure 8: *Military doctor pronouncing skeleton “K.V” or fit for active duty, drawing by George Grosz in Grosz/Heartfield: The Artist as Social Critic.*

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